

What is “Work First”?

The **Noncustodial Parent Work First program** is part of Michigan’s career development program, helping unemployed or underemployed people who owe child support. Twenty-five local “Michigan Works” agencies operate the program. Local employer-led workforce development boards oversee the program.

“Work First” is a partnership of the Michigan Supreme Court, the Friend of the Court, the Family Independence Agency, and the Michigan Department of Career Development.

*“Work First” puts
parents to work, not
just behind bars.*

1-800-285-WORKS (9675)
www.michiganworks.org

**How can I
find out more
about “Work First”?**

Call **1-800-285-WORKS**
(9675) or your local Michigan
Works! agency. You can also visit
the Michigan Works! web site at
www.michiganworks.org.

**For technical
program questions,
contact:**

**Michigan Department of Career
Development**

Office of Workforce Development
201 N. Washington Square, 5th Floor
Lansing, MI 48913
Telephone: 517-335-5858
Fax: 517-335-5945



Works for kids . . .

*because parents need jobs to pay
child support*

Works for parents . . .

*by helping them find employment
and training*

Works for taxpayers . . .

*who save money when parents who
owe child support are put to work,
not just put in jail.*

Works for courts . . .

helping them get support for kids

How can “Work First” help families?

By finding work for unemployed or underemployed parents, “Work First” helps parents who have problems paying child support. “Work First” can train parents with little or no job experience so that they can enter the job market and start making support payments – before they run up big arrearages. Children then get the financial support that they need. In addition, parents who are behind on child support often face the sanction of jail time. “Work First” provides an alternative to jail time, and saves tax dollars, by putting parents to work, not behind bars.

Can “Work First” be used as an alternative to jail time?

Yes, a judge may refer a parent to “Work First” in lieu of jail time. However, “Work First” can also be used in addition to a jail sentence.

Who is eligible for “Work First”?

To be eligible, a parent must be
1) unemployed or underemployed; and
2) either in arrears on child support or in imminent danger of becoming in

arrears. Funding priority goes to parents who meet the above criteria and whose children receive Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, Food Stamps, Child Day Care, or Medicaid.

How does the program work?

Friends of the Court (FOC) staff and Circuit Court Family Division judges may refer parents to “Work First.”

“Work First” provides a full range of employment-related services:

- job search assistance
- job retention support
- post-employment training
- related services (transportation allowances, uniforms, tools, auto repairs)
- referrals to substance abuse, rehabilitation, or mental health services

How effective is “Work First”?

Although “Work First” is under-used, the program resulted in collection of more than \$2 million in child support in FY 2000-2001. Through the third quarter of FY 2001-2002, more than \$1.5 million has been collected.

Does “Work First” help FOCs collect child support from parents who are employed?

Yes, “Work First” has helped uncover many parents who are employed and who owe child support. A referral to “Work First” often exposes a parent who is actually working, but who has tried to conceal the fact in order to avoid paying child support. Here are some examples:

- One FOC referred 341 parents to “Work First.” Ten were found to be already employed. The FOC collected \$20,991.04 in support from them.
- Another FOC's referral turned up \$10,138.54 in support from parents who turned out to be employed.
- Another FOC collected \$40,312.36 from parents after a “Work First” referral revealed that the parents were already employed.